



## TOWN OF LEESBURG

### Citizen Information on Pandemic Flu

One of the major stories in the news today concerns the dangers of a Pandemic Flu outbreak possibly occurring from the Avian (H5N1) or bird flu that is spreading throughout the world. Leesburg officials are working closely with Loudoun County and Virginia officials to make sure that the necessary plans and preparations are in place and that accurate and timely information is provided to the community. When talking about a pandemic, it is important to understand the commonly used terminology:

1. **A pandemic** is a global disease outbreak. Pandemic Flu (influenza) occurs when a new flu virus emerges for which there is little or no immunity in the human population, it begins to cause serious illness and then it mutates/changes so that it spreads easily person-to-person worldwide.
2. **Seasonal flu** is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It is caused by strains of flu virus similar to those of past years. Some people may have built up immunity after having the disease. It usually can be prevented by taking the vaccine offered for each year's flu season.
3. **Avian or Bird Flu** is caused by avian influenza viruses, which occur naturally among birds. The current avian flu strain is known as H5N1. This virus, H5N1, currently does not spread easily from person-to-person.

#### When is the next pandemic flu expected?

Historically, the 20th century experienced 3 pandemics of influenza:

- 1918 influenza pandemic caused at least 500,000 U.S. deaths and up to 40 million deaths worldwide
- 1957 influenza pandemic caused at least 70,000 U.S. deaths and 1-2 million deaths worldwide
- 1968 influenza pandemic caused about 34,000 U.S. deaths and 700,000 deaths worldwide

No one can predict when a pandemic might occur, but many scientists believe it is only a matter of time before the next one arises. Experts from around the world are

watching the H5N1 Avian (bird) Flu situation in the Middle East, Europe and Asia very closely and are preparing for the possibility that the virus may begin to spread more easily and widely from person to person.

### **What is the government doing to address pandemic flu?**

In Virginia, pandemic flu planning efforts have been underway for several years. A draft pandemic flu response plan was developed in 2002 and revised in 2006, which gives Virginia a template for dealing with this issue.

At the national, state, county and town levels, Pandemic Advisory and Planning Teams have been established to lead the preparedness efforts. These teams work to develop coordinated strategies designed to address the unique and complex issues presented by a pandemic flu. These include prioritizing who will receive scarce medications and vaccine supplies and how a pandemic will impact the daily activities we all take for granted such as having to close schools or cancel sporting events and large public gatherings during a pandemic.

### **What risks do my family and I face due to the Avian flu?**

**THERE IS NO REASON TO PANIC.** The current risk from the H5N1 Avian Flu outbreak in the Middle East, Europe and Asia is low. While there is no vaccine for the current bird flu and in those cases where humans have been infected it has proven to be very serious, the current strain of the virus is not transmitted from person-to-person.

Flu pandemics are different from many of the threats for which public health and the health-care system are currently planning:

- The pandemic will last much longer than most other emergency events and may include waves of flu activity separated by months (in 20th century pandemics, a second wave of flu activity occurred three to 12 months after the first wave).
- The numbers of health-care workers and first responders available to work can be expected to be reduced as they will be at high risk of illness through exposure in the community and in health care settings, and some may have to miss work to care for ill family members.
- Resources in many locations could be limited because of how widespread a flu pandemic would be.

### **Health Tips**

#### **Protect yourself against the spread of the flu and other germs and viruses:**

- The main way illnesses like the flu and the common cold spread is by tiny droplets sprayed into the air when someone coughs or sneezes. Cover your

nose and mouth with a tissue or your upper sleeve when coughing or sneezing. Throw away used tissues immediately.

- Wash hands thoroughly and often. That means using soap and warm water and washing for 20 seconds. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers when hand washing is not possible.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread when you touch something contaminated with germs. Germs can live for two hours or more on surfaces like doorknobs, desks or chairs.
- Avoid close contact with those who are sick.
- Visit <http://www.cdc.gov/germstopper/> for more information.

**If you do come down with a cold or the flu, take these steps to get well:**

- Wash your hands often.
- Stay home and keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick, too.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink lots of fluids like water, tea, broth or juice.
- Take acetaminophen or ibuprofen as needed for pain or fever.
- Use a vaporizer or saline drops to relieve congestion.
- See your physician if you do not improve

**Communications and Information are Critical Components of Pandemic Response**

Education and outreach are critical to preparing for a pandemic. Understanding what a pandemic is, what needs to be done at all levels to prepare for pandemic influenza, and what could happen during a pandemic helps us make informed decisions both as individuals and as a nation. Should a pandemic occur the public must be able to depend on its government to provide scientifically sound public health information quickly, openly and dependably.

**To Learn More Visit:**

- Official U.S. government Pandemic Influenza Web site  
[www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Pandemic Flu  
[www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic)
- Virginia Department of Health Pandemic Flu Web site  
<http://www.vdh.state.va.us/EPR/PanFluSummit.asp>  
<http://www.vdh.state.va.us/PandemicFlu/PanFluDVD.asp>
- Loudoun County Health Department Web site <http://www.loudoun.gov/flu/>

(This information in this document is a compilation and summary of information available on the Virginia Department of Health [VDH] and the Center for Disease Control [CDC] websites.)